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DCI/IC 74-0186  
15 March 1974

Mr. Wheaton Byers  
Executive Secretary, President's Foreign  
Intelligence Advisory Board  
Room 340, Old Executive Office Building  
Washington, D. C. 20500

Dear Wheaton:

Many thanks for your comments. They are most helpful and, incidentally, similar to those offered by others like yourself in whom we have confidence born of experience and exposure. Unfortunately, the paper, which is a trial balloon, does imply that we are aiming for a single comprehensive system. Our real purpose is to find a simple and effective way to do three things: (1) to keep book on the nature, current planning, and future progress of existing community systems; (2) to project the future analytic environment and its data needs; and (3) to influence the development of current systems in such a way as to ensure an adequate degree of compatibility at the lowest cost to meet the essential needs of all customers.

Dr. Hall has been engaged in a large piece of the matter, the military commands also. The availability of new technologies is spurring plans for more elaborate systems with perhaps insufficient focus on all their implications. Your story of the experience at Rota is an excellent example. CIA has been more conservative and pragmatic about the actual needs of analysts. I think Bill also wants greater focus on what the analyst can and will use in the way of automated data support and assurance that innovations will in fact better serve the ultimate consumer of the intelligence product.

Our draft paper suggests that, given the history of incremental decisions in such matters (and these could have been no other way), it is time for a low key mapping of where we seem to be heading.

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The existing systems have generated a good deal of their own momentum and resistance to major changes in direction. I agree with you and others that a single person or committee won't change the tides and certainly "big" approaches aren't the answer. I'd like to feel, however, that sensible people can judge whether we're all moving in the same direction and make discrete and incremental adjustments to bring about adequate and appropriate compatibility. Idealistically perhaps, I believe we can better harness the flow to the realities of analysis and the value of information in the environment we project for U.S. policy use of intelligence. This is the thrust of IC interest.

If Bill locates the "omnipotent" czar to help him and the Secretary of Defense with an overview, this alone will offer a breath of fresh air. He'll need help and I expect will want outside inputs.

Sincerely,

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13 February 1973

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MEMORANDUM FOR:

SUBJECT : COINS

1. The trend towards automated file storage and retrieval systems within the intelligence community is inexorable, and the establishment of such systems will probably be substantially accomplished in all agencies within the next ten years. It is obviously desirable, and eventually will become essential, to ensure that these systems, once developed, are compatible, since there will always be a requirement for some analysts of one agency to have access to some of the data banks in others. At the present time, the demand for such inter-agency access is relatively modest and is unlikely to increase dramatically until a further period of trial and error with different data banks reveals demonstrable needs and until a more accurate means has been established for determining extent of use.

2. Automating file storage and retrieval is an expensive business for each agency. Providing inter-agency access among these systems (i.e., COINS) is relatively cheap. Justification for the establishment of such automated systems in each agency rests primarily on factors, such as manpower and space savings, unrelated to the desirability of establishing a COINS system. COINS should be looked on, therefore, as an added benefit resulting from separate systems, which are developed primarily for the internal management purposes of each agency rather than as a goad to compel agencies to develop automated systems at a pace and cost which cannot be justified by their internal needs.

3. Based on the foregoing rationale, the action priorities on COINS come out with somewhat different emphasis than in the  study. The first order of business is to require the separate members of the community to plan and work towards fully compatible automated file storage and retrieval systems. Primary justification for the introduction of new hardware, however, should not be based on a COINS requirement, but rather on the internal needs of each agency.

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4. The second priority in the COINS system development is to resolve the security problem. Until this is done, the separate members of the community will have serious and justifiable reservations to the introduction into the system of files of potentially greatest community interest.

5. The third priority is to determine with considerably greater accuracy than now exists the size and nature of the requirement for a COINS system. A way must be found to determine which files from one agency are needed by the analysts in another as opposed to files that would merely be "nice to have." Two lines of action are suggested by the Malkin report. One is to purge COINS of files which have proved of marginal use and introduce new files (the report claims 42) for which a requirement has been established. This is essentially a system of trial and error which, through experimentation, will reveal in practice which files deserve to be in COINS and which do not. The second line of action is to improve and refine COINS reporting procedures so that the use and value of particular files can be determined accurately and quickly, thus reducing to a minimum the inherent inefficiencies of the trial and error system.

6. It is evident that no part of the intelligence community has a predominant interest in the development of the COINS system and none is peculiarly qualified by function to direct it. It is par excellence a service of common concern or, more accurately, a coordination of separate actions by separate agencies to achieve a common objective. Because of this, there is little logic in assigning any one agency as the program manager. Responsibility must rest with the DCI who, working through the USIB/IRAC mechanism, can propose, coordinate, direct, and monitor the courses of action required to realize the COINS concept. For this purpose he should be supported by a USIB/IRAC task force, chaired by a DCI/IC officer and having as representatives such substantive, as opposed to policy, people as George Hicken, Harry Eisenbeiss, and Norman Solat.

7. In brief, I can't agree with [redacted] first recommendation that "the DCI direct that an aggressive program of automated exchange be undertaken." I think this puts the cart before the horse. I think more deliberate speed is required and that the chief requirement is to ensure consultation/coordination among the archivists, rather than the hardware types, of the community. Even if COINS as a program did not exist, it would inevitably come into being because of technological changes in data handling and the constant requirement for inter-agency data exchanges. The proper role for management should therefore be catalytic rather than Messianic.

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